
The MCA Advisory

The Newsletter of Medal Collectors of America

Volume 12 Number 9

October/November 2009

Board Members

John Sallay, President, jsallay@comcast.net
David Menchell, Vice President dmenchell@aol.com
Barry D. Tayman, Secretary/Treasurer
John W. Adams
David T. Alexander, davida@stacks.com
Robert F. Fritsch, bobfritsch@earthlink.net
Scott Miller, wheatabix@comcast.net
Ira Rezak, ira.rezak@med.va.gov
Donald Scarinci, dscarinci1@aol.com
Michael Turrini, emperor@juno.com
Benjamin Weiss, Webmaster

John W. Adams, Editor

99 High Street, 11th floor
Boston, MA 02110
john.adams@canaccordadams.com

Barry Tayman, Secretary/Treasurer

3115 Nestling Pine Court
Ellicott City, MD 21042
bdtayman@verizon.net

Benjamin Weiss, Webmaster

benweiss.org@comcast.net

Website: medalcollectors.org

Editor of Collectors' Guide, Dick Johnson
(dick.johnson@snet.net)

Dues: \$30.00/Year \$50.00/2 years

From the Editor 3

Summary of MCA Board Meeting 3

Of Mosquitoes and Elephants 4
(by Lev Tsitrin)

**The Anthony Wayne Comitia
American Medal** (by Tony Lopez) 6

Letters to the Editor 17

What's New on Our Website!

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE EVERY MONTH

From the Editor

This issue is graced by articles from Lev Tsitrin and Tony Lopez, two authors whose energies and analytical insights uplift us all. Read, imbibe and re-read these two outstanding pieces. Therein is much to be learned.

Last week, we were privileged to visit the Maine Historical Society located in Portland, Maine. The hospitality was outstanding and the collections, which include an example of the original Dunlop Declaration of Independence, contain much to recommend them. These I intend to cover in detail at a later time. For now, suffice to note that the *Comitia Americana*'s include a virtually complete set of cast copies. We mention these because the technology employed—white metal (probably lead) cast and then bronzed—is relevant to the Lopez article later in this issue. The technology employed together with the access to original medals to act as a matrix combine to point directly at the U.S. Mint. Copying by the Mint, whether by casting or electrotyping would be a fertile field of study for some enterprising member of our club. These copies were ordered and made with the best of intentions. Though spurned by some, they are attractive collectibles in our opinion.

Summary of MCA Board meeting, October 15, 2009.

Board meetings

The Board agreed to meet quarterly by conference call, in addition to the full membership meetings held twice a year at the NYINC and ANA conventions.

Membership meetings for 2010

38th Annual New York International Numismatic Convention, January 2 -10, 2010

(Waldorf Astoria Hotel, 301 Park Avenue, New York City)

The MCA meeting will be at noon on Saturday, January 9. Ben Weiss will speak on “Medallic History of Religious and Racial Intolerance: Medals as Instruments for Promoting Bigotry.”

A.N.A. World's Fair of Money, August 11-15, 2010, (Hynes Convention Center, Boston, MA)

The MCA annual meeting is planned for Thursday, August 12 at the Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS) from 3 to 5 PM in their Dowse Library. This allows time for the members to enjoy the Society's numismatic material that will be on exhibit throughout the public areas. John Adams and Anne Bentley will speak on the *Comitia Americana* medals and John's new book on Admiral Vernon and his medals.

The Sundman Lecture series will also occur at the MHS on Thursday from 9 to 4. Arthur Fitts has kindly agreed to schedule any medal presentations before our meeting starts so that members can take advantage of a full day of medal-related activities.

MCA Oral History Project

Tony Lopez will serve as editor of the project and is busy finishing up a back-log of recorded interviews. There are four complete series available at

<http://www.medalcollectors.org/ORAL%20HISTORY/Page%201.html> with more to come.

The board wishes to encourage more interviewers to step up and solicits names of potential interviewees.

Membership survey

The Board is working on a survey to ask our members where they would like the MCA to go in the future.

Don't forget

Webmaster Ben Weiss reminds the membership to send him their announcements and articles for the web. His e-mail is ben@benwiess.org

Of Mosquitoes and Elephants

(by Lev Tsitrin)

A purchase of what once was an excellent cast of one of Matteo de Pasti's well-known large medals of Isotta degli Asti with an elephant on the reverse, ruined when someone decided to improve it by giving it a nice coating of black oil paint, provided an impetus for a good deal of reading, during which I was surprised to learn that there was somewhat of a difference of opinion among the experts as to the artistry of the famous elephant reverse.

While the chief modern authority on Matteo de Pasti, Dr. Pier Giorgio Pasini, goes into ecstasies over it, describing it with unsurpassable eloquence as "one of the most impressive representations of animals on a Renaissance medal, with its bold and fluid design, massive in its modeling yet sensitive to the subtle details of the skin, a natural and heraldic figure, it sits voluminously with precision and harmony in a flat space, a carpet of grass and a background of sky...", the somewhat more prosy (though not any less competent) George Hill, the doyen of all students of the renaissance medal, refers to it tersely in his 1905 book on Pisanello as mere "sturdy, if not very successful elephant."

If I were asked before I got my own example of it, I naturally would have been in Hill's camp – if for no other reason than on a sheer Aesop's principle that "the grapes are sour." But now, just as naturally, I gravitated towards Pasini's view – after all, isn't it better to have "one of the most impressive representations of animals" than a "not very successful" one? Conflicted by the authorities, I decided to conduct an independent

investigation of the question – as independent as the rather obvious conflict of interest would allow.

To evaluate de Pasti's success or failure in depicting the elephant, it was helpful to first understand his intentions in placing an image of this animal on the reverse of the medal of Isotta, one of many mistresses, and later a third wife, of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, a mid-fifteenth century mercenary based in Rimini, and a great patron of renaissance artists – whom he patronized less for the love of art, than for purposes of self-aggrandizement. Rimini's church of St. Francis, after Sigismondo had it beautifully renovated, has his full name inscribed all over it. In a truly monomaniacal manner, it is spelled out in huge letters both on the façade, and on entrance arches to every chapel, so much so that now it is known only as "tempio Malatestiano" – the temple of Malatesta. Then, of course, there are portrait medals of Sigismondo (two by Pisanello on top of over a dozen by Matteo de Pasti – including those with the much-admired reverse of his castle, the Rocca Malatestiana), and quite a few of Isotta. All his commissions were firmly centered, to use the Beatles song, in "I Me Mine," his "I" being that of a bully with an immense ego and a rather oversize view of his own power.

And this is where the elephant, a big and powerful animal, fits right in – quite apart from having been the Malatesta family emblem for many generations. "Elephas Indus culises non timet" – "The Indian elephant fears no mosquitoes" – this motto of supreme arrogance (the more accurate, though admittedly less literal, translation would have been the intimidating "don't you mess with me") – accompanies elephant images made for Sigismondo's brother and nephew, according to "The Currency of Fame," and there is little reason to doubt that Sigismondo also subscribed to the sentiment. He was, after all, a fierce professional soldier whose troops fought either for pay, or to advance the perceived political advantage of the master whose

alliances constantly shifted, in accordance with the perceived direction of political winds. The elephant must have been to him a symbol of overwhelming power, of the power that could plow through any resistance, whether it came from an army or a woman, from the church or the people, the power to crush all opposition with no more effort than an elephant needs to walk through a swarm of mosquitoes. One suspects that he imagined that this power indeed was his, and that he was the big elephant needing to fear the small fry like fellow-condottieri Federico de Montefeltro and Francesco Sforza, or pope Pius II, or king of Naples Alfonso I, not more than so many mosquitoes. In the context of the Isotta medal, the charging Malatesta elephant also serves as symbol of his ownership of better things than the others do (including the beautiful Isotta), and thus, of his personal superiority. Inscriptions on his church, and depictions of the castle on his portrait medal declared, loud and clear, “I have the finest church, and I got the strongest castle,” and the Isotta medal (inscription on the earlier version of which declares her to be Italy’s paragon of beauty and, believe it or not, of virtue) adds to this list of “I Me Mine” achievements “and the prettiest girl in Italy is mine too – and don’t you mess with ME!”

Now that we have a not unreasonable idea of what Sigismondo’s elephant stood for in his mind, it is time to compare that image to the actual animal. One wonders how the Malatestas would have felt if they had a copy of “The Larousse Encyclopedia of Animal Life” and could read how “in spite of its thickness and harness, elephant skin is very sensitive to insect bites and readily chaps under exposure to the sun. Wild elephants therefore bathe frequently, afterwards rolling in the mud.” So much for “Elephas Indus”’ disdain for “mosquitoes.”

False symbols blind. It would have been far better for Sigismondo to learn that even an “Elephas Indus” has to treat mere “culises” with circumspection, if not respect. Perhaps that lesson would have helped him to curb his

propensity for arrogance and treachery, and the resulting civility, faithfulness to his promises and open-mindedness would have helped him to do better than he eventually did – for in the end, the enemies he made proved not mere “mosquitoes” to his “elephant,” but bigger elephants than he himself was, and greatly reduced his territory and power.

As to Matteo de Pasti, he made a mistake, too, if he thought that the elephant he was depicting was “Elephas Indus.” My knowledge of elephants being limited to what I learned, when a kid, from Rudyard Kipling’s “Just so Stories,” I did not realize that Indian elephants are quite distinct from African ones, the two species being readily distinguishable by the form of the forehead (“arched” in African versus “concave” in Indian), the difference in the trunk (“two triangular appendices or “lips” on the tip of the trunk” in the African species versus just one in the Indian) and the relative size of ears (“large” in the African versus “small” in the Indian). Now, de Pasti’s elephant has a perfectly symmetric, half-moon-shaped tip of the trunk of an African elephant, and very large ears (encyclopedia’s picture of an Indian elephant shows ears that are, relative of the profile of the head, about half the size of de Pasti’s elephant’s).

Interestingly, the way de Pasti’s animal moves, gives every appearance that he was working from life, that he actually saw an elephant (“The elephant walks with an ambling gait. The two right feet move forward together, then the two left” – precisely as in the medal.) He could have seen it in a menagerie – an elephant is apparently recorded in Florence very close to the time of Matteo de Pasti: John Hale’s book “Renaissance” reproduces a contemporary engraving of a giraffe presented to Lorenzo the Magnificent by the emissary of Egyptian Sultan, with a comment that “Lorenzo donated the giraffe to Florence’s famed menagerie where, only two blocks from the Palazzo Vecchio, Florentines could also see caged bears, an elephant or a den of lions.” Such diplomatic gifts of exotic animals must

have been given to other powerful Italian states like Venice, too. Some two centuries later, Rembrandt saw an elephant in Amsterdam, and drew it. Admittedly, ships were bigger in the seventeenth century than in the fifteenth, and perhaps could have transported an elephant more easily; but on the other hand, Italy is so much closer to Africa, making transportation, especially of just an elephant cub, easier. (Mantegna painted some elephants for the series of “triumphs of Caesar” some fifty years after the Isotta medal, but those were hardly done from life – their trunks are so thin and round, they look just like ropes.) Perhaps, de Pasti worked from a really good drawing or painting. However it may be, Matteo’s elephant is a rather convincing beast.

But in the end, what follows? Is Pasini right, or is Hill? Is it a good depiction, or a so-so one?

The answer to the question of artistry seems far less important than the much bigger question this medal poses. Does factual accuracy matter? Does it make any difference whether Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta based his worldview on the proud notion that “the Indian elephant fears no mosquitoes” when in fact he should have humbly minded the fact that “even the African elephant needs to be careful around insects”?

I think the answer is “yes” – reality does matter – even if in our present-day, “politically,” rather than “factually,” correct world we no longer think so. As to the medal itself – well, it is what it is. Unlike the hard facts of this world, the beauty is merely in the eye of the beholder.



The Anthony Wayne Comitia Americana Medal (by Tony Lopez)

Revolutionary War General Anthony Wayne, well known by his legendary title as “Mad Anthony” Wayne, was one of the most dedicated soldiers in the American military fight for freedom against the rule of King George III. His important contributions to the cause of liberty on the battlefield began at the breakout of the Revolutionary War in 1775 when the 30 year old Wayne was chosen by the

Continental Congress to raise one of four regiments of militia in Pennsylvania.

Wayne fought gallantly at the Battle of Trois-Rivières, (Three Rivers, Canada) despite the fact that he was seriously wounded in the leg during the battle. In recognition of his leadership, General Philip Shulyer put then Colonel Wayne in charge of the American forces at Fort Ticonderoga. On February 21, 1777, Wayne was promoted to Brigadier general. Wayne led troops in the battles at Brandywine Creek, Germantown, and Monmouth, and served with Washington at Valley Forge.

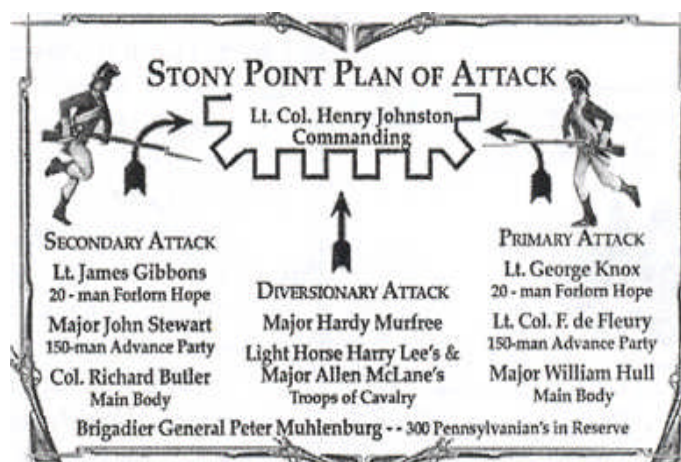
The disastrous Battle of Paoli, in Malvern, Pennsylvania, was fought on September 21, 1777. In defeat, the American commander General Anthony Wayne suffered 237 casualties after a night attack by British Major General Gray under General Howe's command. Known as the "Paoli Massacre", it was believed that Wayne's forces were caught sleeping, resulting in 53 killed, 113 wounded, and 71 soldiers missing or captured. After the defeat, Wayne demanded his own Court martial; which took place as he requested. Despite Wayne's belief that he should be castigated and suspended, thirteen members of the court ultimately ruled that Wayne had in fact acted with dignity and honor in the engagement. They ruled that Wayne *"did every duty that could be expected from an active, brave and vigilant officer, under the orders which he then had. The Court do acquit him with the highest honor."*

A careful study of the events surrounding the battle indicates that the American forces were more disorganized than surprised; it was clear they were not sleeping. The description of the battle as a "massacre" was created in part by contemporary propaganda that the British troops bayoneted awakening troops seeking quarter; the fact that the British actually took American prisoners indicates this version of the viciousness of the attack may be fictional. Of the 71 missing soldiers, many could be attributed to desertions.

Given the numbers, the Battle of Paoli was an American defeat for Wayne, but hardly a massacre.

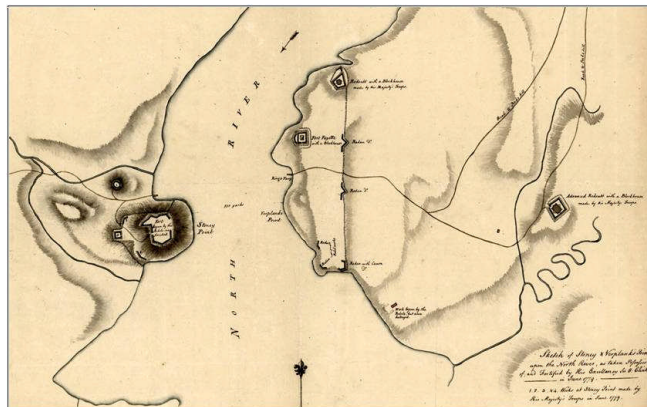
Bayonets and Bravery – the Battle of Stony Point

The historical significance of the decision to return the courageous Wayne to military service was demonstrated on July 16, 1779 in the Battle of Stony Point. Stony Point was a fortified British stronghold which stood on a 150-foot promontory on the Hudson River, across from Fort Fayette at Verplank's point, between which the British used the Kings Ferry to cross the Hudson River. Stony Point was referred to as "Little Gibraltar" by the British, and was a defensive peak on a peninsula which jutted into the Hudson River, surrounded by deep water and marshes. The British defense at Stony Point, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Johnson, was designed to be impregnable, both with its natural physical obstructions, ramparts and fortifications, and its defense by 625 Redcoats, in two lines of 300 soldiers; the outer line had seven artillery pieces; the inner line was defended by six more guns.



The Defenses at Stony Point forced Washington to fortify his American defenses at West Point on the Hudson, just a few miles north of Stony Point. The forces at Stony Point not only threatened West Point, they defended

New York City twenty four miles south, and prevented the American forces from traveling down the Hudson to defend the Connecticut coastal towns which were being harassed by Clinton's troops. In order to move forward in the military cause for independence, Washington knew that he must defeat the British troops occupying Stony Point.



June 1779 British map of Stony Point

Washington and Wayne devised an ingenious and brilliant strategy for attacking the forces at Stony Point, requiring great courage and skill by the Continental forces. Approaching the promontory in the middle of the night under cover of darkness, using an elite force of only their most experienced and best trained troops, a 1000-man force was split into two columns; a group of 700 men led by Wayne would approach through the sandbar from the south, the other 300 man column would approach from the north at the Kings Ferry Bridge. Each column had an advance party of 150 men, led by Major John Stewart from the north and Lieutenant Colonel Francois Louise Teisseidre de Fleury from the south. A third smaller column would attack from the west as a diversion. In order to guarantee that neither of the larger columns was detected, they approached Stony Point with only fixed bayonets or pikes, and their muskets unloaded to insure that they were not accidentally discharged, giving away the surprise attack. The American forces included artillerymen

intended to use the British guns to fire upon the gunboat and defenses at Verplank's point. Leading each advance column were 20 men – their “Forlorn Hope” - who carried nothing but axes to cut through the British fortifications.

The American troops were headed for a hand to hand battle against impenetrable British fortifications, artillery, and gunfire with nothing to carry out their night assault but their bayonets and bravery. After an 8-hour, 15-mile march from Fort Montgomery through the mountains undetected, the three columns approached Stony Point in darkness through the marshes at low tide. A little after midnight, the British sentry noticed moving figures in the dark, and fired shots, signaling the beginning of the battle. The “Forlorn Hope” quickly chopped through the British abatis and the two American columns began pouring through the outer walls of the British fortifications, undetected.

To the West, the American center diversion line, headed by Major Hardy Murfree, began firing. The British, in a state of confusion, defended the center line, and returned fire. Colonel Johnson began organizing his troops to defend the western attack from the center, falling into Wayne's trap, unaware of the larger numbers of American infantry looming at his flanks and rear. The inner defenses of the British lines were quickly breached from all sides by the undetected influx of the American infantrymen. French Colonel de Fleury was the first to cross the British Lines, and personally tore down the British flag. Shortly after DeFleury and his advance troops attacked, Stewart's men breached the British lines from the North. In a close-quarters battle that lasted barely 15 minutes, the British could not mount a defense, and were completely overrun by the swift and aggressive attack of bayonet wielding Continentals from all sides. The Americans, in a tradition that would credit them through most of the conflict for freedom from British rule, gave quarter to any soldier who surrendered. In the morning, the American artillerymen used

the British guns to fire upon the surprised British defenses at Verplank's point, who believed the discharge of cannon was a sign of British Victory.

Wayne received a wound to his head early in the assault which at first appeared horrific and mortal, but which fortunately turned out to be a graze from which he quickly recovered. The victory at Stony Point was the last American Victory in the north, and most important, represented a turnaround in the fortunes of the American military efforts against Britain, boosting much needed American morale at a critical time. The British suffered casualties of 63 dead, and 74 wounded, who were among 546 taken as prisoners, including the British commander, Colonel Johnson. Wayne also impounded 15 pieces of artillery and the other British stores at Stony Point.

The next morning, General Wayne dispatched a note to his commanding officer George Washington that *"The fort and garrison, with Col. Johnson, are ours. The men behaved like men determined to be free."* The victory at Stony Point had avenged Wayne's defeat at Paoli, and vindicated any questions about his tactical skills as a Military commander. In a historic coincidence, Wayne's defeat at Paoli had also come from soldiers wielding unloaded muskets with bayonets fixed; General Gray had used this tactic instructing his British soldiers to attack any one who fired a weapon. Wayne's incorporation of the same strategy to accomplish his overwhelming and quick victory at Stony Point must have added to the satisfaction he felt in avenging Paoli.

There is no definitive evidence as to how Wayne received the "Mad Anthony" nickname, but it was later popularized by author Washington Irving. It has been generally held that Revolutionary War General "Mad Anthony" Wayne gained this "Mad Anthony" sobriquet because, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, of his *"tactical boldness and his personal courage in the field."*

The name is also attributed to Wayne's insightful but seemingly crazy plan for the attack at Stony Point against fortified artillery and gunfire with only bayonets. In fact, Wayne was rather cautious and a highly skilled strategist on the battlefield, and while he led his troops from the front lines, was not as crazy or reckless in battle as the pseudonym implies. Wayne did have a hot temper, and was well known for his angry outbursts at his subordinate officers, so perhaps "Mad Anthony" was a reference to Wayne's harsh demeanor. One folklore version gives credit for the nickname to a spy named "Jemmy the Rover" who was jailed, and pegged Wayne with the "Mad Anthony" moniker when Wayne threatened to flog him instead of assisting with his release. When hearing of Wayne's threats, he responded that *"Anthony is mad! He must be mad, or he would help me. Mad Anthony, that's what he is. Mad Anthony Wayne."*

Wayne Awarded a Congressional Comitia Americana Medal

For his leadership and fortitude in the American Victory at Stony Point, the young United States Congress awarded Anthony Wayne a gold medal known as a Comitia Americana medal (for Congress of America). The leaders of the two advance lines, Colonel Francois Louise Teisseidre de Fleury, and Major John Stewart, were also awarded Comitia Americana medals, to be struck in silver. During the Revolutionary War, a total of only eleven Comitia Americana medals were awarded by congress. The fact that three of those eleven medals were awarded for the Battle of Stony Point is indicative of the importance of the battle to the American cause.

The United States did not have a mint, or any other means to strike medals, so the duty to arrange for the design and striking of the medals first fell upon Benjamin Franklin, who was in France to advocate for the American cause with the Court of Louis XVI. The Paris Mint had the resources and skill to strike the

medals. Franklin, a true Francophile, perhaps to a fault, first arranged for the design and striking of the de Fleury medal. He deferred to the French Colonel, perhaps for diplomatic reasons, and ignored the obvious protocol that de Fleury's commanding officer Anthony Wayne should have had his medal designed and struck first. Franklin also ignored this etiquette and failed to have several other medals awarded by Congress completed, including the medal awarded to the Commander in Chief, George Washington.

Having completed the silver medal for de Fleury, Franklin demonstrated his indifference regarding the medals to be awarded to the remaining recipients. Franklin arranged for the engraver, DuVivier, to simply take the dies for same Stony Point medal designed for de Fleury, remove de Fleury's name, and replace it with Wayne's and subsequently Stewart's names to strike their medals. This was apparently done, and the medals for both Wayne and Stewart were carelessly struck with the de Fleury design in 1780. Franklin's apathy concerning the importance of the awards is further established by the fact that he kept those two Stony Point medals for four years, waiting until August of 1784 to have them delivered by Henry Laurens to their intended recipients.

The location of these two original DuVivier medals arranged by Franklin to be struck for Wayne and Stewart is unknown today. The original silver medal for de Fleury has long been claimed to be a silver example found by a boy in a garden in New Jersey in the nineteenth century. This implausible piece of folklore has been regurgitated by numismatists and authors for nearly a century; a fairy-tale just recently and thankfully condemned in John Adams and Anne Bentley's opus *Comitia Americana and Related Medals Underappreciated Monuments of our Heritage*. For all practical purposes, the current location of the de Fleury medal is also unknown. Perhaps a careful examination of the 5 known de Fleury silver examples cited in the *Comitia*

Americana census and their provenance could reveal whether one of them is in fact that awarded to de Fleury.

While there is no written evidence indicating this, it appears that the original Wayne and Stewart medals by DuVivier and Franklin were unsatisfactory; in the late 1780's both medals were later redesigned and struck again by the Paris Mint under the direction of Thomas Jefferson. Perhaps Jefferson was unaware that the two Stony Point medals had been completed by Franklin in 1780. In 1789, DuVivier and Dupre were busy with other projects for Jefferson, so the duty of redesigning the Wayne (and Stewart) medal was given to the competent engraver Nicolas-Marie Gatteaux.

The Obverse of the Wayne medal features the allegorical image of America as an Indian Princess presenting a laurel wreath and a crown to Anthony Wayne. Surrounding is the legend in Latin "**ANTONIO WAYNE DUCI EXERCITUS**" and below an exergual line is the inscription "**COMITIA AMERICANA**" (The American Congress to Anthony Wayne, General of the Army). Signed "**GATTEAUX**" above the exergual line below Wayne's feet.

The Reverse has a central vignette showing the battle scene at Stony Point; the British fortifications on a precipice; the American columns approaching. The detailed design also shows an erroneous depiction of American artillery in the foreground ready to fire; the designer obviously did not know of the impressive stealth of the American forces. Surrounding the battle above is the misspelled legend "**STONEY-POINT EXPUGNATUM**" (Stony Point stormed) and in exergue the incorrect date "**XV JUL MDCCLXXIX**" (July 15, 1779 – should be July 16 as the attack took place after midnight.) Signed "**GATTEAUX**" on the exergual line at left.

The original gold medal measures 54 mm and was brought with Jefferson to America aboard the *Clermont* on his return from Europe. Jefferson delivered the medal to President

Washington on March 21, 1789, when he reported as Secretary of State. The gold medal was forwarded by the President to Anthony Wayne 4 days later, on March 25, 1779, along with this letter:

Sir,

You will receive with this a medal struck by order of the late Congress in commemoration of your much approved conduct in the Assault of Stoney(sic) Point-and presented to you as a mark of the high sense which your country entertains of your services on that occasion.

This medal was put in my hands by Mr. Jefferson; and it is with singular pleasure that I now transmit it to you.

I am,

Sir,

With very great esteem,

Your Most Obed. Serv.

G. Washington

The original gold medal presented to Wayne by Washington was consigned by the Wayne family in 1978 to Sotheby Parke Bernet, where it was hammered for \$52,500 to the Pennsylvania Sons of the Revolution. (John J. Ford Jr. was the under bidder.) It is currently on display at Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Sadly, it is among only five of the eleven Comitia Americana medals awarded whose location is known; the George Washington gold medal is at the Boston Public library, Horatio Gates gold medal resides at the New York Historical Society, the Nathaniel Greene gold medal is at the Rhode Island Historical Society and the silver medal awarded to John Eager Howard is in the collection of the Maryland Historical Society. It is indeed tragic that others of these priceless historic artifacts of the military struggle which formed our nation are missing or mislaid.

The whereabouts of the original Wayne dies used to strike the Gatteaux Comitia Americana medal are likewise unknown. Medalllic impressions struck with those original

dies are exceedingly rare, and effectively non-collectible. Other than the original gold medal, the census of Wayne original medals in *Comitia Americana* records only 5 other examples; two in silver, two in bronze, and an obverse splasher. Only one example, in bronze, exists in private hands.

The United States Mint created copy dies of the Wayne medal in 1887 to strike medals to meet collector demand. Medals struck from those dies are easily differentiated from the originals by the dissimilar font style and slightly different placement of the lettering in relation to the designs. Collector demand was not great, and US Mint restrikes were not struck in large numbers; in R.W. Julian's *Medals of the United States Mint 1792-1892* the mint records show only 47 Wayne medals struck in bronzed-copper between 1888 and 1904. These US Mint restrikes very rarely appear in the marketplace. The US Mint restrike from John J. Ford's collection auctioned in 2006 realized \$1,150.00

A New Discovery

In the December 2008 issue of the MCA Advisory, a medal with a "corded border" was pictured, along with a copy of an e-mail I had sent to John Adams regarding the medal. Excited about the find (from the fuzzy eBay picture in the listing where I bought it, I had no idea that it had the corded border) I mistakenly described the medal as a Daniel Morgan (Comitia Americana) medal in that e-mail. The design of the medal pictured was clearly not that of a Daniel Morgan. Cast bronze and silver plated, the medal is in fact the design of the gold Comitia Americana medal awarded by the US Congress to General Anthony Wayne for the Battle of Stoney Point.

In *Comitia Americana*, page 196, in the chapter dedicated to the Libertas Americana medal, Adams-Bentley include details regarding a "corded border" Libertas medal under the heading of "Unusual Pieces". Adams-Bentley make reference to an important

1996 article in the CNLF *Colonial Newsletter* where medal expert and numismatic author Michael Hodder had researched and written about this same corded border Libertas Americana medal.

According to *Comitia Americana* the specimen pictured in the Colonial Newsletter is not a struck medal, but rather “*a cast taken from a matrix of an earlyish die state*”. In looking at the design characteristics of the corded Libertas medal, it does appear to match the struck medals from the earlier die states seen on the struck Libertas medals. For this reason the corded Libertas medal was generally presumed to be of contemporaneous late 18th century manufacture along with the Libertas medals struck in Paris at that time, which it matches in detail.

Hodder noted the important fact that the diameter of the corded Libertas medal was larger than the standard struck Libertas medals; 49.3 mm vs. the usual 47.5-48 mm size. The *Comitia Americana* census lists ten struck Libertas Americana medals with diameters ranging from 47.4-48.0 mm, indicating that the diameter of the medals is consistent with little variance. The slightly greater diameter of the corded Libertas allows for the size of the additional corded design feature, which is placed on the surface of the medal’s obverse and reverse designs between the inner and outer rims.

In considering the history, qualities and characteristics of the corded Libertas medal, and lacking any contemporary explanation for its existence, Hodder conjectured that master French engraver Augustin Dupré may have experimented with the use of a special corded design collar, strategically placed to hide the telltale obverse rim die-break seen in exergue to the lower left of the “4” in the date “4 JUL 1776.” This obverse die-break is the primary authenticating die characteristic seen on all genuine Libertas Americana medals. In *Comitia Americana*, Adams-Bentley concur that the strategic placement of the corded border appears to support Hodder’s

conclusions, but they then focus on the important question as to why the corded design, if it is in fact a prototype design, was not placed into production. They believe, (and I would agree) that the corded border design would have detracted from the extraordinary beauty of the Libertas medal, and thus Dupré (and perhaps Benjamin Franklin as well, or both) chose not to use it in their final design.

From the scant records known, the corded border Libertas medal appears to be extremely rare, perhaps unique. It was not actually pictured in *Comitia Americana*. I am unaware of any auction records for an example of the corded border variety of the Libertas medal. Most medal collectors, even those who are specialists in the Betts and *Comitia Americana* series have never owned, or even viewed an example. The John J. Ford, Jr. collection did not include an example of this rarity in his extensive holdings.

The *MCA Advisory* has recently focused additional attention on the “corded border” Libertas Americana medal. This interest began when the MCA membership was fortunate enough to have an example of the rarity actually pictured in the September 2008 issue of the *MCA Advisory*. The issue included a Letter to the Editor from numismatist Dennis Tarrant, along with the photograph of an example of the elusive corded border Libertas Americana medal. Tarrant requested any information and input by MCA members regarding the unusual medal’s origins. Tarrant spoke with me regarding his medal, and has informed me that his medal is in fact the same one shown by Hodder in the CNLF article, indicating the possibility that the corded Libertas medal could be unique. Tarrant’s pictured specimen also measured 49.3mm, and according to him “*appears to be cast in silver and is certainly antique.*”

In an unusual and noteworthy coincidence, shortly after this renewed interest in the corded border Libertas medal was regenerated both by its inclusion in *Comitia Americana*, and the *MCA Advisory*, along

comes the new discovery of an Anthony Wayne corded border medal. The corded Wayne medal, similar to the corded Libertas medal, is also cast and, silver-plated, with a slightly larger diameter than the original Wayne medal, and the corded design feature is placed between the inner and outer rims of the medal.

Most significant, from the pictures of the corded Libertas medal and this newly discovered corded Wayne medal, the design and placement of the actual corded feature on both medals clearly matches. Visually, when comparing the two medals, the similarities are so great that there can be no question that they share a common origin.

[That the one medal is thought to be of silver and the other silver-plated strikes us as intriguing. We offer to run specific gravity tests if the owners are willing.—Ed.]

In my December 2008 published letter to John Adams revealing the discovery of the corded Wayne medal; and again wrongfully incorporating the idea that the medal was a Daniel Morgan (vs. Anthony Wayne) medal, I had also mistakenly made the inaccurate comment, "*Strange that this medal is Dupré's other masterpiece.*" Both the Libertas Americana medal and the Daniel Morgan Comitia Americana medals were designed and engraved by Dupré, and so I mistakenly made this common Dupré association between both corded medals. My "masterpiece" comment was, of course, a back-reference to the existing theories about Dupré's possible experimentation with the corded design collar on the Libertas Americana medal. If this medal was actually a Daniel Morgan medal, then its discovery would have strongly supported theories about Dupré's experimentation with the border, and the idea that the corded Libertas medal was a cast prototype. But it is not.

This new corded medal discovery was not one of Dupré's medal designs; the Wayne medal was engraved by Gatteaux. As an Anthony Wayne medal by Gatteaux, previous conjecture and conclusions regarding Dupré and the corded Libertas appear to be

invalidated simply by the fact that the Wayne medal was not designed by Dupré but by fellow French engraver Nicolas-Marie Gattéaux. It is noteworthy that the original Wayne medal also did not have any major die breaks on its rim which needed to be corrected and redesigned, so the mutual use of the corded border is not likely to be related to the famous Libertas diebreak.

The existence of this newly discovered corded border Anthony Wayne medal, which matches the corded border design of the Libertas, is helpful in attempting to uncover the ongoing mystery of the true origin of the corded Libertas, and now both of these unusual corded border medals. Here are two similarly corded medals; matching the medal designs of two different Monnaie du Paris engravers; Gattéaux and Dupré. With previous theories about the Libertas corded border medal version being an experimental piece designed or created by Dupré now invalidated, how do we account for these corded border medals?

If the medals were not created only by Dupré or Gattéaux, and were not designed to correct the appearance of damage to the dies on the struck medals, then what was their origin, age, and purpose? Other than Michael Hodder's discussion of the subject, I have done an extensive search to locate any reference to either corded medal in the preceding two hundred years since the medals were struck, and have come up empty handed.

I know of only one example of each medal, and having condemned previous theories that the corded design was created to correct die damage, looking at only single examples of each medal does not allow comparisons with possible varying states of their manufacture. The corroded condition of the corded Wayne medal causes some difficulty in comparison, but it does reveal the silver plating, and bronze core.

Comparing the matching qualities of the medals may shed light on answering some of these questions. Both medals are cast. Both medals share the corded border, of course, and

their diameters are slightly larger than the original diameters of the struck medals. The larger size appears to be just enough to accommodate the additional width of the corded design, while maintaining the design elements of the original medals in their original size.

The MCA Advisory indicated that the Tarrant Libertas medal had only a corded border on the obverse; in fact there is a corded design on both sides if you look carefully at the images, and this was confirmed to me by Dennis Tarrant. The reverse in the scan from the September 2008 MCA Advisory actually appears to have the corded design but it is worn down making the corded design difficult to discern.

Dennis Tarrant and Michael Hodder both note that the corded Libertas exhibits the diebreaks seen on a genuine original Libertas Americana Medal. The newly discovered Anthony Wayne corded border medal also exhibits the characteristics of the original medals struck from original Paris dies; the lettering style and placement matches that of the original medals. It seems logical; therefore, that whoever produced or had these corded border casts created must have been in possession of both an original Libertas Americana, and an original Anthony Wayne medal (or the dies) in order to make the molds or matrix for the central designs of these two corded border medals – before adding the corded border design to the molds.

Given the extreme rarity of original Wayne medals, one could attempt to extrapolate the time frame and limited number of manufacturing locations or individuals who could have had access to both medals to create these casts. It seems simplest to presume that the Paris mint was the source; they had both the dies and the medals at their disposal to create these corded casts. I am unaware, however, of any contemporary casts produced at the Paris mint, or any evidence of the manufacture of cast medals in their manufacturing processes. The Paris mint was striking, and not casting medals during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

[The U.S. Mint also had access to original medals (they borrowed from the Webster set) and they made casts of COMITIA AMNERICANA designs to order—Ed.]

Ultimately the discovery of this Anthony Wayne cast and corded border creates more questions than answers. It does, however, bring us closer to the truth as to the origin of these unusual and rare finds. For now, their origin remains a mystery, and my research continues.





Note the difference in the spacing of the reverse exergual date. The US Mint strike (above) has a large space between XV and JUL. The corded example (below) is closely spaced, as are the originals struck at the Paris mint.-



Note the style of the lettering of the US Mint strike above, and the corded border below. The thinner rounder lettering of the corded border matches that of the Paris mint originals

Letters to the Editor

Dear John:

Hank Spangenberg's sad tale about trying to sell Liberatas bronze medals, reminds me of my purchase. I was in Paris in 1960 and bought from a female dealer, Madame Kapamigi (not sure of the spelling) for 200 New Francs (\$40.00) a lovely AU silver Liberatis. Do you think its value has increased over the years? It was sold to Ted Craige about 1975.

Best,

George Fuld

Dear Editor,

I would like to share my concerns with those who truly love the traditional medal-making and will be willing to participate in a collective effort to preserve the knowledge, the skills and methods of this rare art form.

The fact that art appreciation classes are no longer included in the public education programs could be one of the reasons why we sometimes pay more attention to the pedigrees and prices than to the aesthetic value of our collectibles.

So, here is my challenge to those, too shy to discuss the specifics of style and execution of their numismatic gems who just passively subscribe to the assumption that "the beauty resides in the eye of the beholder" and don't believe that we can objectively "weigh and measure" our medallic masterpieces based upon their artistic merits.

A short list of useful "tools" of more intelligent approach to the aesthetic "judgment of Paris" would include:

- the knowledge of the rules of composition (you bet!);
- the basics of anatomy (no kidding!);
- the linear perspective (what for?);

- the art of lettering (do you mean calligraphy?);
- the psychology of perception (why bother?);
- some understanding of metallurgy and chemistry (who cares?) and, of course;
- substantial familiarity with history and art history.

These days, when the steady output of both, official and private minting turned into an endless stream of crude imitations of the older works as well as incompetent efforts "to add a modernistic touch" to the art that has a great chance to follow many other traditional crafts on their way to the extinction.

With my several decades of continuous experience in the business of delivering numismatic products to the collectors well recognized by the prestigious awards and commissions (I am one of a few remaining active Recipients of ANS S. Saltus Award and the ANA Excellence in Medallic Art Award) I can sincerely expect that my offer to volunteer on such a project would be met with some understanding and support from our fellow members of MCA who believe in preservation and dissemination of knowledge as one of the most important aspects of our hobby activities.

Should we try together to bring such an idea to life by let's say next annual meeting and share some of our discoveries with the numismatic community? It may in a positive way influence the process of issuing of our contemporary commemoratives so they don't look like "made by a committee" and are more desirable than the "jewels of the crown."

Thanks.

With my best,

A. Shagin, Sculptor

[An artistic ignoramus though I be, count me in. Are there others? Ed.]

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Date:
Name:
Mailing Address:
Street:
City: State: Zip code:
Telephone (Work): (Home):
Email:

QUESTIONNAIRE

How did you learn about the MCA?

What are your collecting interests?

What would you see highlighted in MCA publications?

For volunteers: I am willing to devote time to the following MCA projects:

DUES: \$30.00 PER CALENDAR YEAR (Includes a subscription to monthly publications of the MCA advisory)

Please send completed application and payment to:

Medal Collectors of America
c/o Barry Tayman
3115 Nestling Pine Court
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Or email completed form to: bdtayman@verizon.net
MCA WEBSITE: <http://www.medalcollectors.org>